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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT June 23, 1931

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "Laundering Colored Clothes." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

Bulletin available: "Methods and Equipment for Home Laundering."

--ooOoo--

I found my Next-Door Neighbor pressing out Betty Jane's summer party dress, when I stopped in yesterday. It is a dainty frock of pink dotted voile with a bit of smocking in front, one that my Neighbor had made herself. I noticed that she ironed with great care and that every now and then she stood back and regarded it with what was certainly an affectionate look.

"I never launder this little dress," she said, "without thinking of one much like it that I had when I was a child -- a little pink smocked dress with puffed sleeves that was my pride and joy."

She stopped and sighed. Then she went on ironing in silence.

"Go on," I urged. "Tell me the rest. I know there must be a story behind those remarks."

"There is," said my Neighbor. And sighed again. "One of the most sorrowful events of my childhood had to do with that pink dress and a pair of overalls and a new laundress.

"The laundress believed in soaking clothes over night to loosen the dirt and save work. (A good idea, of course, with white clothes or with fast colors.) But, alas, the laundress was somewhat lacking in judgment. She had not been educated in that safe and sane method of sorting clothes before soaking. So, one unfortunate Monday, into the tub along with the rest of the washing went my dress and my brother's overalls together. They soaked all night. In the morning out came my pet frock looking--well, as my brother said, looking like the proper costume for a purple zebra. The blue of the overalls had come loose in the water and wandered to my dress where it settled in streaks. And the blue and pink together made the result a purple. The streaks varied from lavender to a deep dark hue. And this new color refused to be removed by any means known to the laundress or my mother. Even my tears--and there were plenty of those--could not restore the clear, pale pink of my favorite dress. I believe a good many other garments, soaked in the tub on that occasion, were also afflicted by the overall blue, but my memory only retains the picture of that hilarious purple frock.

"The laundress, as I remember, declared that she was only used to dealing with garments with fast colors. She was very high and mighty indeed about overalls that would run. I was sufficiently agitated to think she should be punished. I certainly would have been pleased if she had had to stand in the corner or even go to bed without supper for ruining my lovely dress and then not even pretending to be sorry.

"But do you know what happened instead? She was allowed to take the purple dress home to her little girl who, it seemed, was just my size. My mother said it was no use to us now. Wasn't that enough to make me believe that there wasn't much justice in this world?

"Seriously, though, Aunt Sammy, I think there is an art in washing colored clothes successfully. With all the new colored fabrics on the market this year, there are likely to be other disasters like the one I've been telling you about unless the laundering is done with care. Fortunately, manufacturers are making an effort to make all dyes fast. But still one finds frequently some that run or "bleed". Fabrics like that have to be treated properly, don't they? Otherwise they may come out of the wash tub sad-looking objects indeed."

We all are likely to have colored clothes in our wardrobes this year, especially the children. Cotton fabrics are back and very popular--the gayer the better in plain colors and prints of many designs. Linen and silks in many shades are also here. Even household linens-- towels, tablecloths, napkins and bed linen--now are available in colors. More attention than ever is being given to the washability of these gayly colored articles. So many fabrics may now be had in fast colors that much of the uncertainty has been removed. But even the fast colors keep their fresh, new look and clear color longer when laundered correctly and carefully.

Suppose now that this is wash day. In many homes Tuesday is the most convenient day for washing. On Monday there are the left-over jobs from Sunday to do. Moreover, Monday is a good time to prepare the clothes for washing. Any tears, rips or holes may be mended so that they will not grow larger during laundering. Any serious spots or stains may be removed so that they will not be set in the wash tub. The hot water has a bad effect on many stains that could be easily removed if treated properly.

Then there is the sorting of the clothes to do. Put the cottons and linens together and the wools and silks. Separate the white from the colored clothes. It is also a good idea to separate the very dirty from the slightly soiled. The very dirty can then be given some special attention.

In sorting the colored clothes, remember that those known to be fast color may be washed together. The doubtful colors that may run should be separated into a pile of the dark and a pile of the light.

Now to take up the various steps in laundering. With colored clothes the soaking process, recommended for white pieces is, of course, not used. Colors run in washing because the dyes are soluble in water. The warmer the water and the longer the dye is left in contact with it the more the color will come out. So, avoid soaking. Use lukewarm to cool water for both washing and rinsing and do the laundering rapidly. If the clothes are very soiled, use a second fresh suds rather than long soaking in the first.

Soften the water if it is hard, using borax or other mild water softener. Use mild soap or soap flakes and, as I mentioned before, lukewarm soap suds.

Chips, flakes, or soap jelly are more convenient forms of soap for making suds than a cake. Melt the soap first in very hot water, then run in cold water until the mixture is lukewarm. Too hot water not only sets many stains but is injurious to color.

Rubbing on the washboard, if done at all, should be gentle. Right here it might be a good idea to mention that elbow grease is no longer recommended for use in all types of household jobs. We no longer believe in beating our rugs violently or scrubbing our clothes vigorously. It wears them out before their time. In laundering, the dirt comes out of the fabric by forcing the soapy water through it. Many clothes need only to be squeezed in the suds to be clean. If clothes are washed before they become very dirty, less rubbing is necessary and they will last longer. Especially soiled spots may be removed by brushing with a small brush dipped in soap suds.

Thorough rinsing in soft water is of great importance to the life and looks of the fabric. Soap or soda left in tends to yellow the cloth, spoil the color and make it scorch easily. So remember to rinse in at least two, clear lukewarm rinse waters. If your supply of soft water is limited, it is more important to use it for rinsing than for washing.

Then there is the question of starching. Organdie, handkerchief linen, voile and other fabrics being worn this summer often need some special finish to restore their crisp, new appearance. Though hot starch penetrates the fabric better and more evenly and does not leave glazed spots when ironed, for colored clothes it is safer to use lukewarm starch and to wring the garment out thoroughly. Special starches for colored fabrics are now available. Sometimes for the lighter colors, a little gelatin is used with the starch. For the darker colors, a solution of gum arabic is frequently used because it is less apt to show streaks than starch. Dissolve a small piece in hot water. Then dilute with cool water to the stiffness desired, and dip the garment in the solution.

Hang the clothes in the shade to dry and hang them wrong side out. Fasten them up by their bands when possible and be sure they hang on the straight of the goods to keep them in shape and make the ironing easier.

If the color shows a tendency to run, it is a good idea to take the garment from the line while it is still damp and iron it then and there. Don't take a chance on sprinkling it and rolling it up. That gives the dye too much opportunity to run. When it comes to ironing, remember again that excess heat affects color. Be safe and use a moderately hot iron.

Tomorrow: "Motor Trips with the Children."